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CHAPTER VII.

HABITS AND CUSTOMS.

D 178 771 NOTWITHSTANDING original tribal differences, the Shin rule in Gilgit and the surrounding valleys practically welded both conquerors and conquered into one people, distinguished only by caste divisions; and, though Mahommedanism has in some instances modified and in others abolished old customs, many of great interest still remain. Many of these, though originating in religious rites and beliefs, have now lost all connection with them in the minds of those who still practise them. It is difficult, almost impossible, now to distinguish between those which were introduced by the Shins, and those which were adopted by them from the original inhabitants; but fairly correct conjectures concerning the origin of some of them may be formed. Hunza is the B [178] country least affected by external influences, and in which the [771] laxest form of Mahommedanism now exists, but there is scarcely any custom or observance maintained there which has not its counterpart still existing, or which till lately existed in the neighbouring valleys. In Chitral and some of the valleys to the westward, many customs seem to have partly disappeared. This may, not improbably, be due to the inhabitants having been earlier converts to Islam, or more exposed to external influences. In the valleys to the southward, like Chilas and Darel, the want of a single ruler and the stricter tenets of Soonnee Mahommedanism have contributed to cause many old customs and festivals to fall into disuse. In spite, however, of local differences, enough remains to show that a strong bond of kinship exists between all the Dard and Ghalchah tribes.

D 142 147 In appearance the men are light, active figures, averaging from 5 feet 5 inches to 5 feet 8 inches in height. Though well made, they are not, as a rule, remarkable for muscular development, presenting in this respect a marked contrast to the Tartar races. Notwithstanding their hardy, simple lives, they seem unequal to any prolonged physical effort. In travelling and shooting I have constantly found them knock up before

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natives of other parts. Their constitutions also seem to want stamina, and they succumb easily to disease or change of climate. This want of physical energy and enterprise is most strongly marked in the Shin caste. They consider husbandry the only honourable employment for men, and so averse are they to labour, that the poorest of them employ Baltis in their agriculture, which is of a rude and slovenly kind. Numbers of Baltis come yearly into the Gilgit district to serve for hire; they receive 6 lbs. of grain for a day's labour.

In disposition they are tractable, good-tempered, fond of rejoicing and merry-making, neither cruel nor quarrelsome, and they submit readily to constituted authority. The worst cruelties perpetrated in the wars between Yassin and Cashmere are distinctly attributable to the Ashimadek class of Yassin and Chitral, who compare unfavourably with the older tribes in this respect. In all the accounts of the Kunjooti depredations on caravans, and of wars in which the people of Hunza and Nager were concerned, there are no records of wanton cruelty or of the exercise of torture. The women are pleasing-looking when young, but are not particularly handsome. Exception must be made in favour of the Khos of the "Fakir Mushkin" class in Chitral who show certain physical peculiarities not shared by the other Dard tribes. In person they are Indo-Aryans of a high type, not unlike the Shins of the Indus Valley about Koli, but more handsome, with oval faces and finely-cut features, which would compare favourably with the highest types of beauty in Europe. The most striking feature about them, and one which distinguishes them from all other Dard tribes, is their large and beautiful eyes, which remind one of English gypses, with whom they share the reputation of being expert thieves. They have also unusually fine hair, of which they are very proud. The women of Chitral were formerly sought out for their beauty in the slave markets of Cabul, Peshawr, and Badakhshan. The fairest complexions are to be seen among the Boorish of Hunza and Yassin, where individuals may be found who would pass for Europeans. Among them red hair is not uncommon.

In dress there is little variety. The loose woollen robe described by Mr. Drew is worn also in Sirkol, Wakhan, Zebak, Chitral, Yassin, Hunza, Nager, and the Yaghestan Valleys. Those who can afford it substitute in summer a cotton robe of the same cut, with quilted edges, worked round the neck

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